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No. 57. VTR group interviews
with American tourists in the
Muskoka region. 1970.

Travel Research Branch

Report

No. 57

VTR GROUP INTERVIEWS

WITH

AMERICAN TOURISTS

IN THE

MUSKOKA REGION

CAZON

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Prepared For

The Department of Tourism and Information

Province of Ontario

September 1970

Prepared By

The Marketing and Research Department

JAMES LOVICK LIMITED

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PURPOSE AND METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

Herein are reported the findings from a series of videotape-recorded (VTR) interviews with American visitors to the Muskoka Lake resort area in August 1970.

The interviews were conducted on two separate days at two resorts, Muskoka Sands Lodge at Gravenhurst and Aston Villa Resort at Bracebridge. Permission to conduct interviews at these resorts was arranged through the offices of the Department of Tourism and Information in Huntsville. Actual respondent recruitment and interviewing was handled by James Lovick Limited personnel, working with management personnel of the respective resorts.

The VTR technique of interviewing has been explained in full detail in proposals and reports submitted to the Department of Tourism in 1969, and need not be elaborated on in this report.

Respondent criteria for interviewing was simply that they be American visitors at each of the resorts. To that extent, they were self-selective insofar as any demographic criteria are concerned, i.e. income, age, etc.



AREAS OF INQUIRY

The areas of inquiry covered in each interview were essentially the same as that for the other VTR interviews conducted, both in the U.S. and Canada. These dealt with past vacation habits, factors influencing a choice of vacation site, future vacation plans, the role of advertising and other information in vacation planning, etc. As will be seen in the body of this report, visitors who stay at resort lodges are distinctly different from other U.S. travellers studied and are, taken together, much more homogeneous in their vacation "life styles" than other Americans interviewed. As such, the length and breadth of topics covered in the interview appear to be much shorter than previous reports. This is due to the nature of the respondents themselves rather than to any interviewing "short cuts" that might appear to have been taken.



SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

American visitors to resort lodges in the Muskoka Lakes region exhibit the following characteristics which set them apart from U.S. visitors studied in other parts of the Province* -

- They are more up-scale in income and occupation
- They are "vacationers" rather than "tourists", in that they spend their vacation in one central location rather than travelling around.
- They are more likely to be repeat visitors, having come to the same region for a number of years, and intending to do so in the future.
- Vacationing appears to be more of a "family affair" in that the choice of destination is based on consideration of the recreational needs of all family members (when children are present).
- They are essentially comfort-oriented creatures who want, at the same time, some aspects of an outdoors vacation.
- Their vacation-planning activities are made far in advance of their actual visit.

* Upper Canada Village, Toronto and Sault Ste. Marie

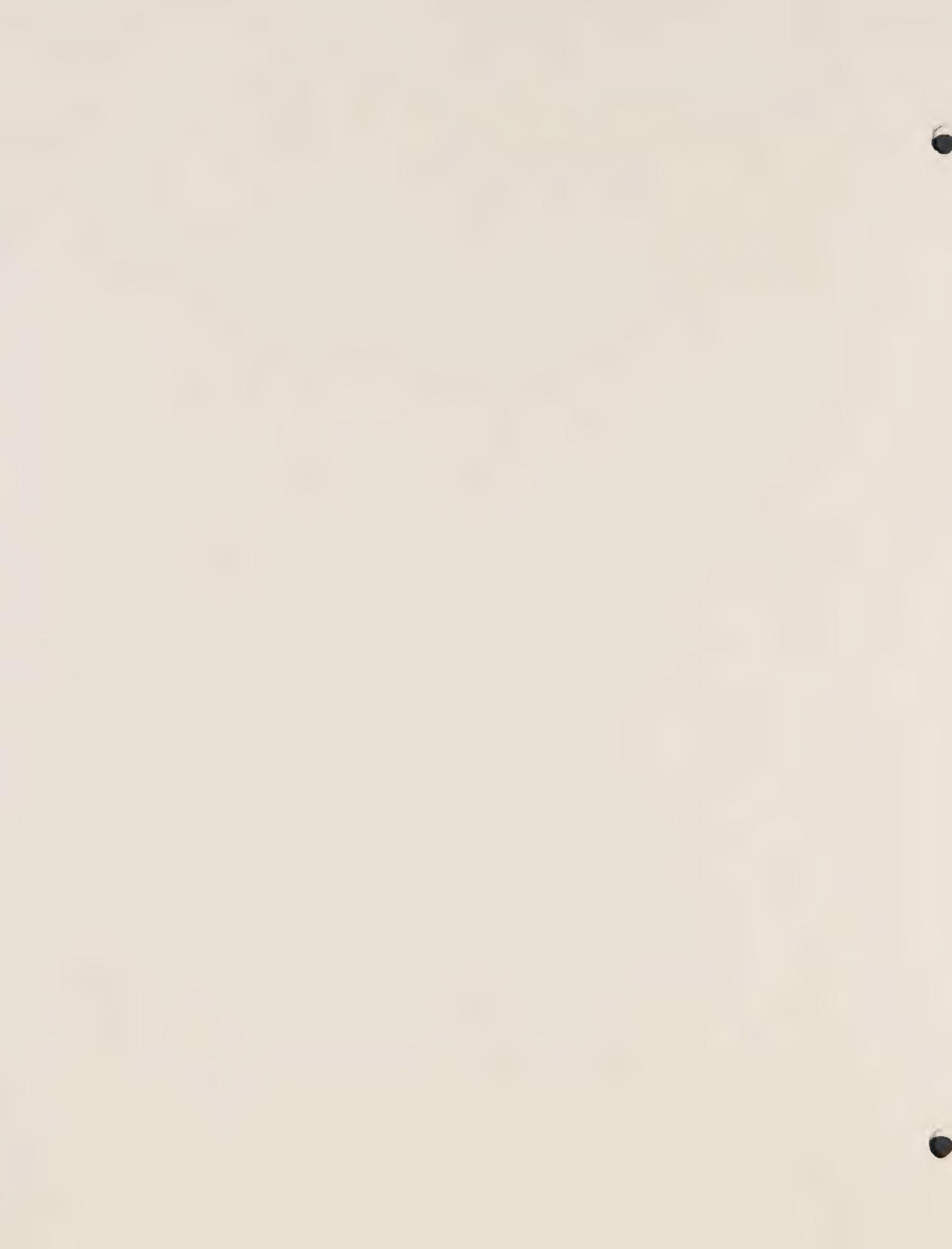


DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

All of the Americans interviewed in this study were up-scale in income and occupation including a judge, a doctor, a radio station owner, middle-management personnel of large U. S. corporations, an interior decorator, a psychologist, etc. No so-called "blue collar types" were encountered.

It might be argued that the rate-structure of resort lodges would preclude visits by "blue collar types", particularly when children are present. This is more apparent than real, however, when the fact is considered that many traditional working-class people in the U. S. have annual family incomes of \$10,000 or more.

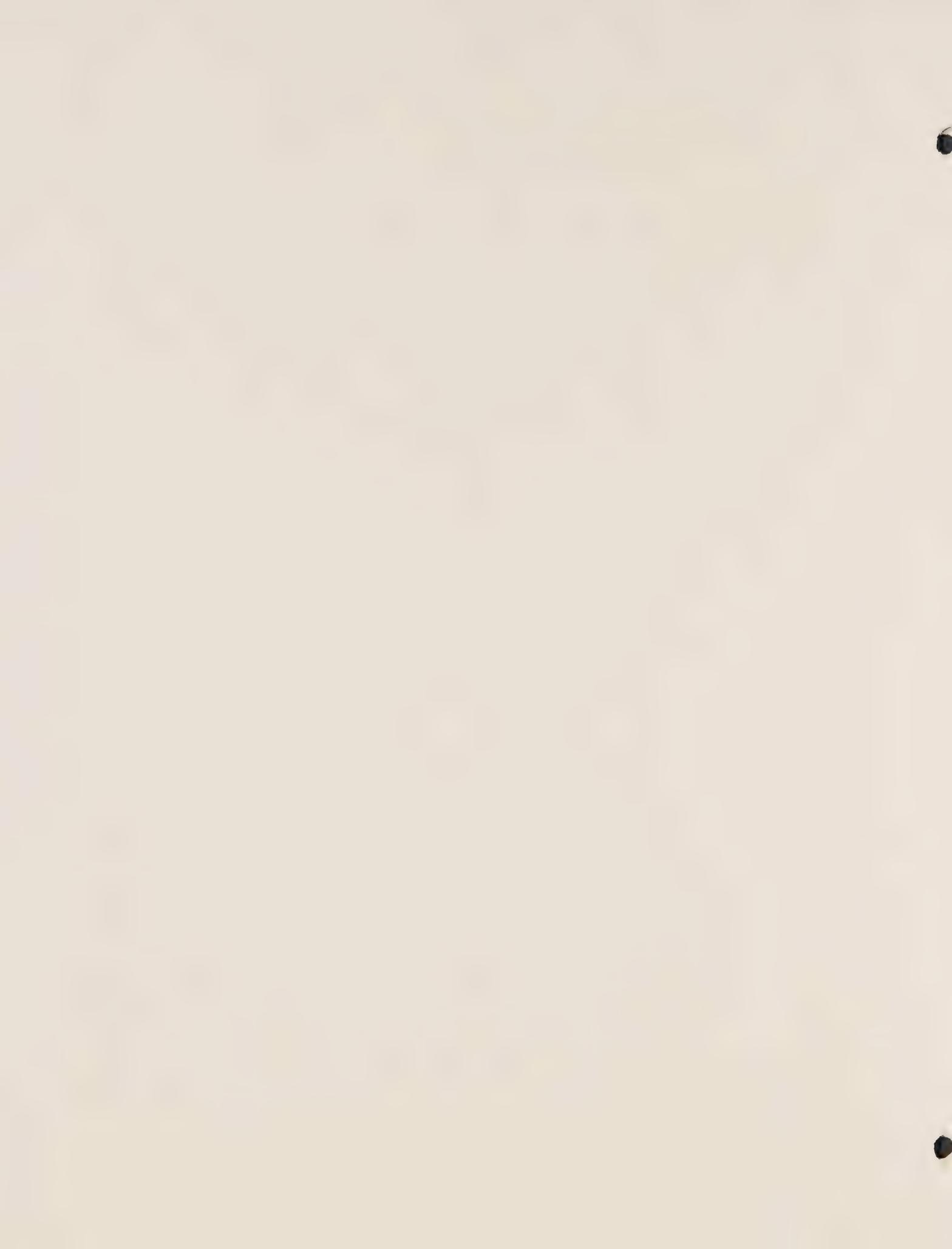
Instead, it would appear that the basic life-styles of the Americans interviewed were more comfort-oriented, but at the same time they wanted the availability of a fairly complete range of outdoor-oriented activities. A resort lodge meets these requirements. And the Ontario resorts at which these interviews were conducted appear to meet these requirements particularly well. No dissatisfaction was registered regarding any aspect of the resorts operations. To the contrary, most respondents held in high regard their particular resort.



This satisfaction is perhaps best indicated by the repeat visits made in the past, and intended to be made in the future. A number of families indicated that they had been coming to a particular resort area for quite a number of years. The judge's wife, for instance, had been going to Muskoka for perhaps as long as 30 years; the judge himself referred to the general Muskoka region as "this is my vacationland". While he had been visiting his current resort regularly for the past eight or ten years, he had vacationed throughout other areas of the general region for much longer than that. Other repeat visitors had also vacationed in the region the previous year and beyond that.

Even the first-time visitors indicated high satisfaction by stating their intention to return in 1971. One such couple had already made their reservations for 1971; others indicated that they might do so before their departure this year.

There were both young and old couples in the groups. Resort vacationing held rewards for each. The older couples in their 50's or 60's tended toward a more sedentary holiday, congregating with others of their age group--although there



was some fishing and boating activity by the male members of these couples. The younger families--those with children, in particular--were more active in their pastimes, availing themselves of the full range of activities offered by the resort.

All family groups interviewed appeared to have one thing in common that was quite influential in their decision to stay at a resort. This was the concern for the housewife's vacation. Resort living enabled the wife to avoid the everyday family work chores that would have to be done if they had instead stayed at a cottage or gone camping, mainly cooking. And the fact that the resort had a full range and program of activities further tended to alleviate the mother, in particular, from the responsibility of planning and watching over her brood; she had more time for her own relaxation.

Thus, the American visitors to the Muskoka resort area were quite alike the New Yorkers who were interviewed earlier in the year (but who had never been to Canada). They were "comfort-oriented" and concern for the female family head's relaxation was fairly strong.



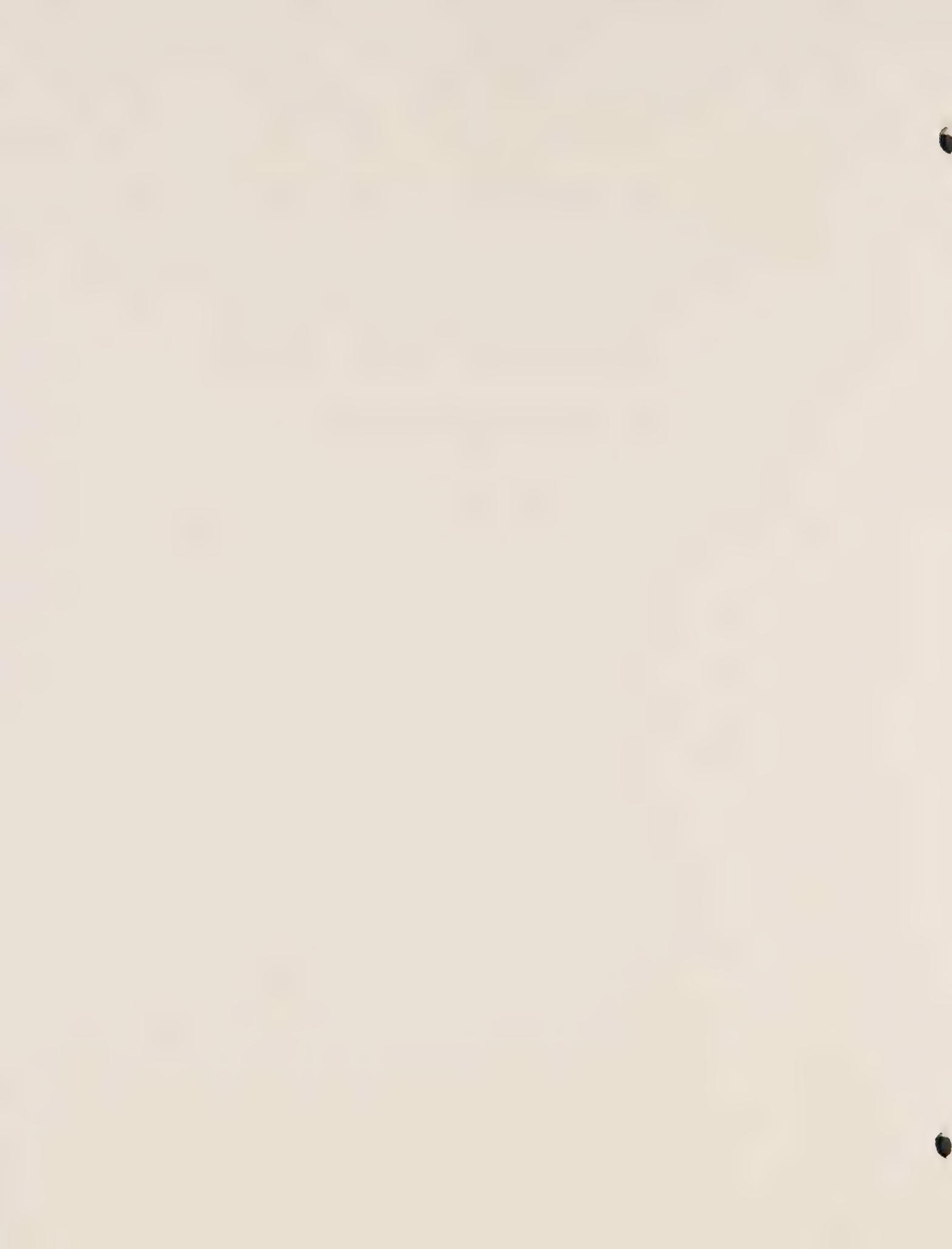
None of the Americans interviewed at Muskoka were from the East, however. They were all Midwesterners, excepting a Rochester and Buffalo couple. Chicago, Indianapolis, Lansing, (Mich.), Cleveland, and Dayton, (Ohio), were typical of the areas from which these visitors came.

The role of communications in influencing a family to visit a Muskoka resort varied. With past visitors, of course, communications were nil. Their previous satisfaction was the sole determinant to visit Muskoka in 1970.

Among the first-time visitors the communications input was somewhat varied in the initial stages, but in the final stage all came down to a final medium: print.

Some of the first-time visitors were initially interested in an Ontario resort vacation by word-of-mouth from relatives or neighbours. One couple came as a result of the husband having attended a business meeting at a resort earlier in the year; he liked what he saw and decided to bring his family up later on.

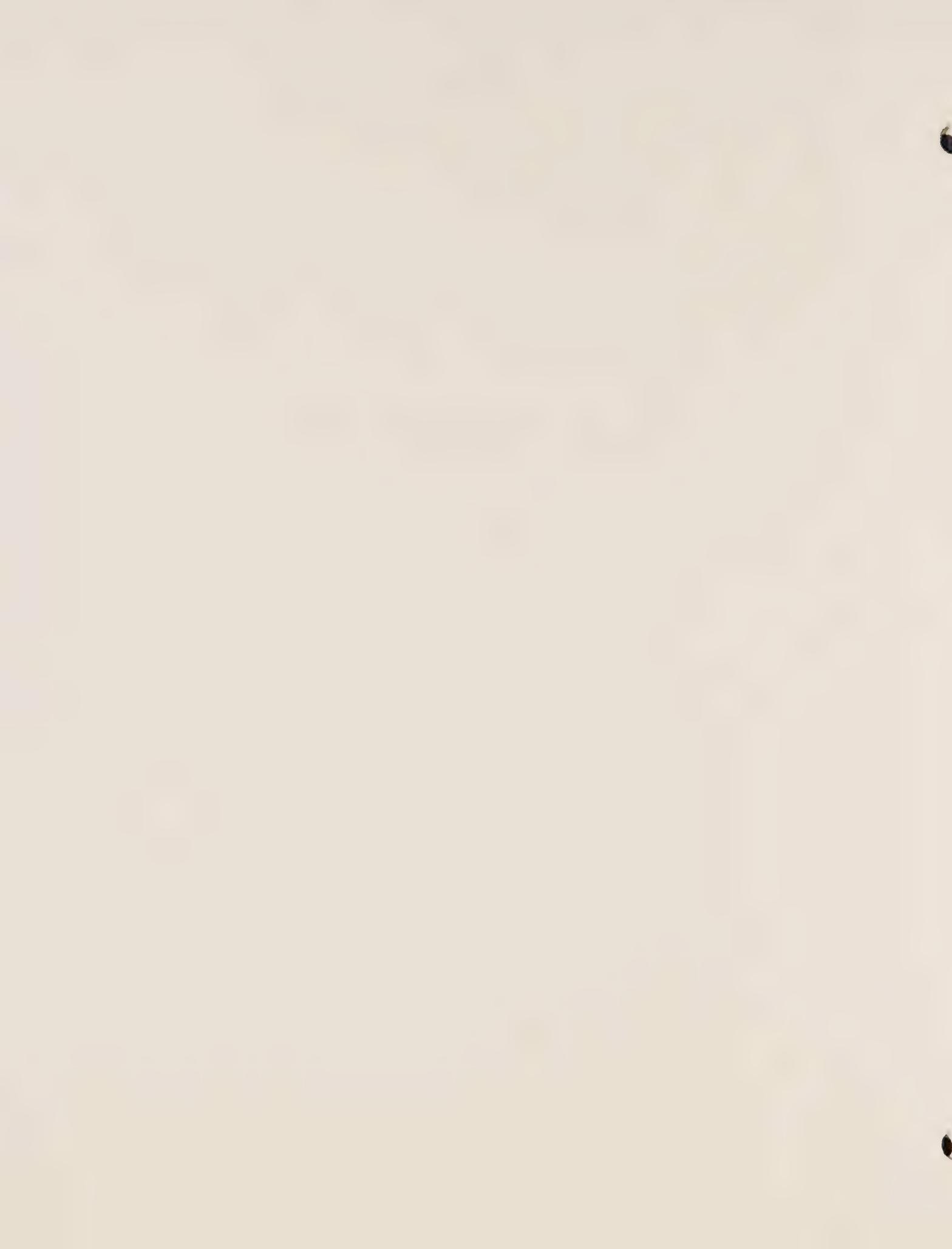
All first-time visitors, however, had this in common: they saw advertising for a resort in the Travel Section



of their newspaper and wrote for literature and then made reservations. A number "shopped", requesting literature from a number of resorts in the general area, and made their final decision on the basis of comparing literature received.

General area advertising did not appear to be too influential in deciding on an Ontario resort vacation. The couple from Dayton did mention seeing Ontario's television commercials. So did the Rochester couple (although it should be added that he worked in a television station and incorrectly referred to the Ontario commercial as being placed by the Canadian Government; his description of the commercial left no doubt, however, that he actually was referring to Ontario's television spot). And there were other scattered comments that might be construed to be references to Ontario TV advertising.

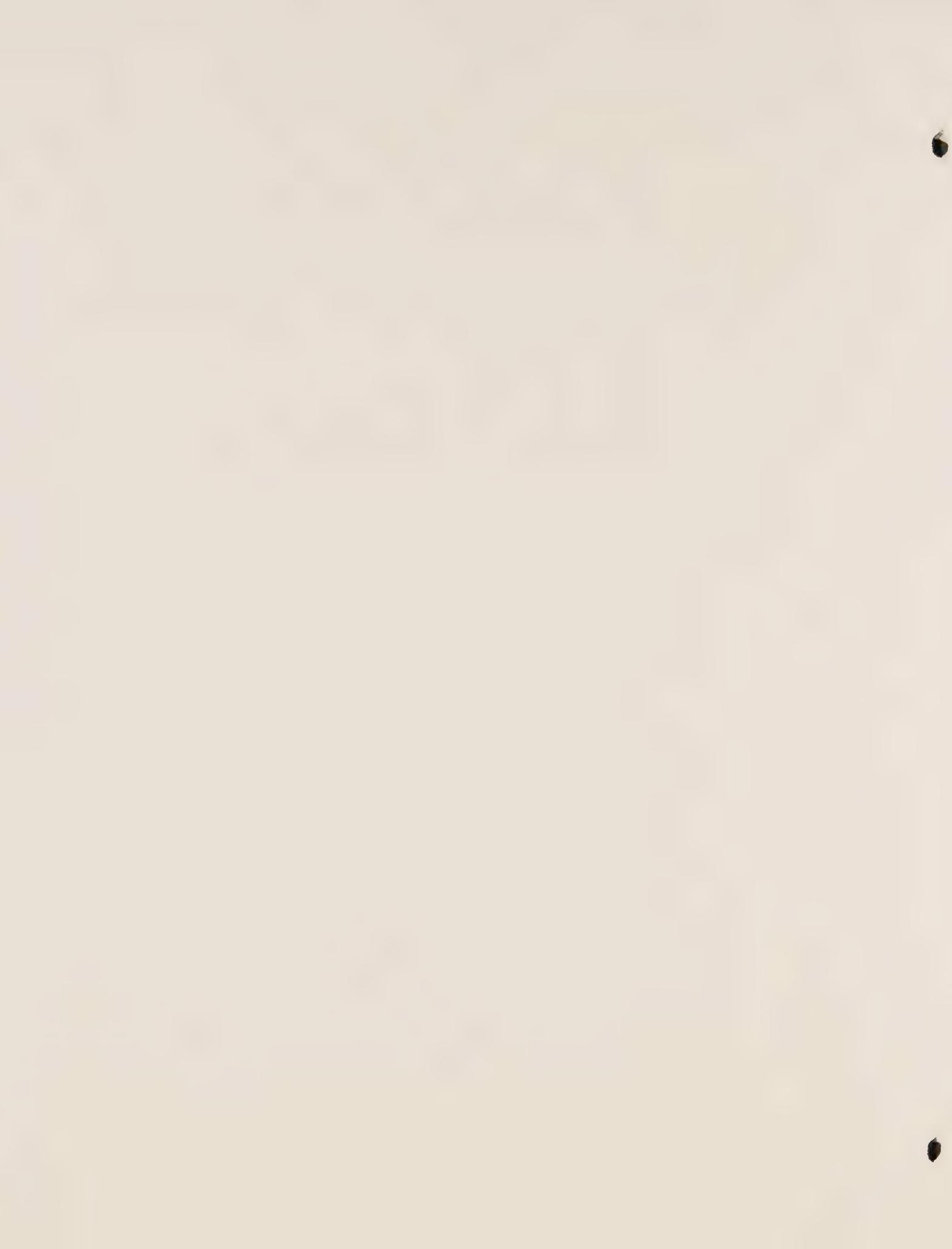
The importance of print advertising—specifically, newspaper Travel Section advertising, should be understood in its proper context, however. Print advertising, per se, did not influence a person to take a resort vacation, either in Ontario or elsewhere. Instead, the communications process known as "selective perception" appeared



to be at play here. These visitors had already made their mind up that they were going to take a resort vacation. They then went to the most obvious place in which to seek out such information: advertisements placed by resorts or lodges.

Planning for a resort vacation took place much earlier in the year than did vacation planning by other American visitors to Ontario who were studied in the past. The nature of a resort vacation is such, of course, that more lead-time in planning and decision-making is forced, since reservations are needed. Thus, a number of the couples indicated that they made their decision as far back as Spring, 1970. This is in sharp contrast to the American visitors to such areas as Toronto or Upper Canada Village who were studied in 1969. Most of these people indicated that their final decision to come to Ontario was almost a "last minute" one--ten days or less prior to departure time.

Multiple vacationing was common among the Americans who visited the Muskoka region. Their "life style" permits this, of course, being fairly affluent and having occupations that give extended vacation time. The other



vacation trips taken by these people tended to be a winter vacation in the South.

From a competitive standpoint, respondents were asked why they did not visit a resort area in the U. S. closer to their homes. The repeat visitors all indicated complete satisfaction with previous visits to Michigan. Further, some volunteered that staying at an Ontario resort is less expensive than at a comparable one in the U. S. The clean environment and friendliness of Canadians were also mentioned. The couple from Dayton, Ohio, pointed out that there are virtually no resort areas in that state, and their state park system is undeveloped. He contrasted this with that of Kentucky, where that state devotes much more of its resources to tourist development, particularly in terms of state parks. He said that they had visited the Kentucky and Tennessee parks and resorts in the past and wanted a change. Northern Michigan was the closest comparable area and, as long as they were going that far north, they decided to go to Ontario. He also mentioned that they had, in years past, vacationed on Lake Erie, just east of Toledo, but that this area was polluted and unfit for vacationing. The couples from Cleveland agreed completely.



The visitors from Indianapolis pointed out a fact that the Dayton visitors had perhaps overlooked. Much of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois is virtually flat and unforested and has little to offer vacationers. Consequently, a couple living in Indianapolis has to drive a fairly considerable distance north before they reach a vacation area offering lakes, forests, fishing, etc. Going this far it is no problem to go a little bit further and be out of the country.

This assumes that a family is going North on an outdoors and/or resort vacation to begin with. Kentucky, an attractive vacation state, is much closer to both Indianapolis and Dayton. Likewise, West Virginia and other parts of "Appalachia" is not as far from Dayton as is Northern Michigan. The depressed economic condition of these areas notwithstanding, these areas have considerable outdoor vacation attractions. In this sense, Kentucky, West Virginia, and parts of Tennessee can be considered competitors to Ontario in attracting visitors from the lower parts of Midwest states, just as Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota are Ontario's competitors in attracting visitors from Chicago, Milwaukee, Toledo, Minneapolis-St. Paul, etc.

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